

# Grieving

## AND THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 HAS MADE THE GRIEVING PROCESS FAR MORE COMPLICATED

BY JIM TIMLICK

**Like many things, the grieving process has undergone a significant transformation during the pandemic as public health orders designed to keep us safe have also kept us apart.**

While grieving the loss of a loved one is often a communal experience, it has become a solitary journey for many during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a difficult time has become even more difficult.

“What it’s done to grief and the grieving experience is it’s complicated things so much,” says Mike Goldberg, community outreach and education coordinator for Palliative Manitoba, a non-profit organization that offers support to individuals grieving the death of someone close.

“The typical grieving process is quite turbulent and chaotic to begin with. When you introduce a disruptive force like the pandemic...and we’re not allowed to see each other or shake hands or hug, we’re not able to get the physiological benefits from those things and it can cause a deep complication and a persistence of the grieving experience. It complicates the path of the griever significantly.”

Even though public health orders have restricted the size of most gatherings including funerals, Goldberg says that doesn’t mean individuals have to deal with their grief alone. He stresses that it’s more important now than ever for people to maintain connections with others who can help them navigate the grieving process, even if they can’t be together in person.

“It’s so important for individuals who are grieving and for people who want to support others who are grieving to seek out connection in a number of different ways,” he says. “While we can’t necessarily visit with each other in person, there are other means like talking to people on the phone or virtual support groups online or Zooming with close family and friends.”

When it comes to seeking out support during the grieving



PHOTO BY DARCY FINLEY

**Mike Goldberg of Palliative Manitoba says the pandemic and the social isolation that has come along with it has made the grieving process a far more complicated experience for many people.**

process, Goldberg stresses that it’s important to understand that some people are better equipped to help than others. First and foremost, find someone you trust. It should also be a person who is a good listener and doesn’t just try to relate your situation to their own experiences, he adds.

“Not everyone is able to have those excellent communication skills when it comes to supporting other people. A lot of people simply want to fix the problem. Unfortunately, that’s not a real solution to a person’s grief. It’s a personal journey and evolution they have to go on,” he explains.

As critical as it is to connect with others during the grieving process, it’s also important to take time for reflection, according to Goldberg. That can include individual contemplation, personal mindfulness or anything that allows a person to reflect on their loss and determine where to go from here.

“The natural tendency for most of us is to find distractions in our lives to not really think about what has happened, not consider the loss and what it is doing to us. It’s a natural coping mechanism,” he says.

“But in order for us to really do the work that allows the grieving process to move forward we have to lean into that experience and let the pain exist. The key thing is to address it head-on and not try to distract ourselves.”

Palliative Manitoba ([palliativemanitoba.ca](http://palliativemanitoba.ca)) offers a number of services to people throughout the province including a telephone bereavement program that provides weekly, one-to-one telephone support by trained volunteers for grieving individuals. It can also help individuals to connect with virtual support groups across the province through its offices at Deer Lodge Centre (204-889-8525, ext. 232).

Another valuable online resource for those dealing with grief is the website [mygrief.ca](http://mygrief.ca) offered through the Canadian Virtual Hospice. It’s a modular program that helps individuals who may be isolated to start their own personal grieving process and can be completed at their own pace.